PILGRIMAGE

TO

AMARNATH

(Adopted from Shri Amreshwar Mahatmya)

Pahalgam Amarnath



1985 A D.

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PREFACE

Shri Parmananda Research Institute has brought out this Guide-book for the facility of pilgrims as well as tourists from within the country and abroad, flocking to the Holy cave of Amar Nath Ji every year. There may be several booklets in the market published by individual devotees or the State Tourist Department which provide information about the sanctity of the Shrine or some description of the journey undertaken from Pahalgam to the Holy cave But this booklet provides some comprehensive detail, based on the ancient literature of Mahatmayas that contain full details of the prominent Shrines of Kashmir, as recorded by the great sage Bhringesha of yore. This collection of various Mahatmayas is remembered as *Bhringesh Samhita* from the ancient times. The foreign researchers who visited Kashmir in 19th and 20th centuries have also attached great importance to this *Samhita*, so far as the topographical description of many ancient shrines and other holy places of pilgrimage is concerned.

Our Institute is bringing out a well researched English and Hindi version of "Amreshwar Mahatmya" which is nearing completion. The project has already taken over two years of research and translation work and is likely to be ready in a couple of months. The volume thus prepared will be useful for deep study. This guide-book, forerunner of the same, will be useful to the average piligrim and tourist who might want a brief, yet authentic, version of Amarnath Yatra. It is hoped that this purpose will be well served.

Vimla Dhar
President

19-8-1985

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The worship of ice-linga, peculiar to Kashmir alone, seems to have been in practice since very early time. Kalhana, the earliest chronicler of Kashmir, tells us that King Sadhimati (34 B.C.17—A.D.), a pious devotee of Lord Shiva, frequently went into the interior of forests to worship ice linga. He also makes a casual reference to the pilgrimage to *Amareshwara* (popularly known as Amarnath) while describing an incident during the reign of king Nara (1048-1008 B.C.) in the *Rajatarangini*.

The ice-linga, in the cave of Amarnath, sends out an irresistible call to hundreds and thousands of pligrims from the remotest corners of India, who crawl up to its height, year after year. The cave in the Himalyan lap of Kashmir is surrounded on all sides by snow - mantled summits that raise their bare silvery peaks to the blue. The entrance to the cave is very wide and few natural caves in India are as spacious and high-arched as this. Sunlight does not penetrate the cave as it faces the south. This too helps the preservation of the icy-emblems of Shiva along with His consort Parvati in it. The self-made ice-linga waxes and wanes with the changing

phases of the moon. The linga attains maximum height on full-moon day in July-August '*Shravana purnima*' when pilgrims and tourists alike from within and outside the counrty, throng the cave, and congregate round the *Linga* to offer worship.

There is a feeling of awe at the majestic sight of this holy place of Hindus. Devotion and faith appear to have assumed form on this day at the sacred site while pilgrims arrive after facing the hazards and hurdles in the way. Man's search for lasting happiness, which has continued since the beginning of time, takes physical form on this day. That happiness, as conceived by great seers and thinkers of the world, both ancient and modern, is possible on realization of the all-pervading supreme self or what they call goodhood. This pilgrimage provides a means to that ideal. The ice-linga is ultimately to be realized as *Rasa-Linga* or *Amrita-Linga* (the emblem of eternal nectar).

Some people, interested in Anthropological or Geological research, describe this linga as an icicle-like incrustation of lime, chalcedony etc. But Pt. Anand Kaul, the pioneer of archaeological research in Kashmir, who carried a research regarding the ice-linga inside the cave of Amarnath made the following observations :

"This Lingam is not impregnated with any matter, but is composed simply of pure water turned into ice. Nor is it an ice-spring, as some say, for on Amavas days the ground in which it stands is found dry. There is, of course, gypsum in the

cave but it does not form the ingredient of the ice-lingam. This ice-lingam waxes and wanes with the moon as stated above, which has been observed by several reliable persons who have stayed at Pancatarni for a full month and have visited the cave from there daily. .. .. this phenomenon is cosidered wonderful by not only Indian scientists including men like Swami Vivekananda, who says in his book that he was all ecstacy on seeing it, but also by European scientists who must have been aware of the formation of rock-matters."

Nature is in her calm majesty here and one feels as if face to face with God. Besides, a pair of mysterious pigeons appears in the cave. Devout worshippers of *Shiva* regard its presence as the sign of consummation of their pligrimage. It is otherwise difficult to find these birds there on account of excessive cold.

Great personages like *Adi Shankaracharya* (early 9th eentury A.D.) are said to have visited the Amarnath cave and experienced eternal peace there. Accoding to Kalhan. king Zain-ul-Abdin (15th century A. D.) made a pilgrimage to Amarnath. Towards the end of the 19th century when Swami Vivekananda entered the cave he was so thrilled with joy that he became completely absorbed and uttered :

"Supreme joy prevails
Ice-linga is verily God *'Shiva'* Himself."

Swami Ramatirtha, on having a glimpse of the *Amareshwara linga* uttered in ecstasy an Urdu couplet, which means :-

"Where ice is bedecked in formless movement,
There stands supreme-consciousness as *Amar-linga.*"

Thus this annual pilgrimage to Amarnath has been playing an important role in bringing together people of almost all parts of India. People from different social and linguistic groups are united with a common purpose that transcends all barriers. This is a fine example of the unifying power of religion. India's basic unity is thus displayed in the midst of over-whelming diversity, not by persuation of any motive but spontaneous and sincere.

The origin of this pilgrimage is described in the Sanskrit book *Bhringesha Samhita*, not extant now. *Rishi Bhringesha* was once approached by people and prayed to show them the path of salvation. The *Rishi* related to them the sanctity of the Amarnath cave and instructed them to make the pilgrimage and have darshan of the holy *Linga.* But the pilgrims were harassed in the way by evil spirits called *Rakshasas.* Thereupon *Bhringesha Rishi* prayed to Lord *Shiva* and with His grace a sceptre was graced upon him to ensure safe pilgrimage to the cave. This has been the symbol of protection to the caravan of yatris ever since and has now taken the form of *Chhari Sahib.* It is understood to be the symbol of authority. Since the Dogra rule in Kashmir the caravan of pilgrims is led by the local Dharmarth Trust who carry this symbol with them right from Srinagar.

About the origin of the *Linga, Bhringesha* gives a story, probably from the *Puranas.* In the beginning of creation nothing existed, either in subtle or in

gross form. There was only the existence of supreme —consciousness, termed as *Parma Shiva.* From its nature evolved I-consciousness. From I-ness appeared Death, *Indra* and other *Devas* (or Divine Powers). The *Devas* feared the Death and they approached *Shiva*. They prayed that they be granted redemption from the clutches of the God of Death. *Shiva* was pleased to grant to the *Devas* immortality by taking the crescent from His head and squeezing the nectar for them. The *Devas* became immortal with the nectar. *Shiva* Himself got liquified into nectar out of love for the *Devas*. The same nectar solidified into *Linga* which began to be worshipped as *Amareshwara* (Lord of immortality) in the Amarnath cave.

According to the present tradition that Maliks of Botakot, (a village near Pahalgam), rediscovered the shrine of Amarnath cave about four hundred years ago, confirms the belief that people must have neglected undertaking the pilgrimage due to some kind of fear or lack of facilities. The rediscovery by the Maliks, is established by the fact that they continue to receive one-third of offerings collected in the cave on the pilgrim-fair day.

"They took the charge of the pilgrim route and were bound to keep the difficult mountain-path in order, to carry sick pilgrims and to see that no property was lost", observed L. Lawrance.[1] These arrangements are made now by the state Government and the pilgrimage is led by the *Chhari Sahih*—the advance party.

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1 *The Valley of Kashmir.*

CHAPTER II

The Ancient Route

Amareshwara Mahatmya of *Rishi Bhringesha,* gives an interesting account of the route to Amarnath followed in ancient times. It contains a description of the halting places for pilgrims, the sanctifying rites to be performed and the worship of deities at the places of the route. The route from Srinagar to Bijbehara led along the right bank of River Jhelum (the *Vitasta*) and from there it led along the right bank of the *Liddar* upto Pahalgam. The onward journey leads through dense forests and flower beds by lakes and streams situated above the snow-line.

Baramulla, a flourishing town 50 Kmr. to the North-West of Srinagar, is said to have been the starting point of the pilgrimage in remote past. On the left bank of the *Vitasta* flowing through the town there is an old shrine *'Koti Tirtha'* which stands even upto this day. Tradition goes that in *'Koti Tirtha'* is the presiding deity of all the shrines of Kashmir, as all the water from sacred springs and streams of the valley flows down in confluence here. Baramulla, being the gate-way to Kashmir during those days remained crowded with people and at the time of Amarnath pilgrimage pilgrims and Sadhus from India assem-

bled at this place. Before making the start mass-feeding was conducted and warm clothes were distributed among the Sadhus coming from the plains. The pilgrimage then moved towards Srinagar in a procession. After circumambulating the *'Sharika Shaila'* at *'Hari Parbat'* Hill on the next day (the first day of the bright fortnight of *Shravana*) it started towards Amarnath.

A short account of the halting places according to the ancient route is given here :-

Srinagar is the ancient capital city of Kashmir. Pilgrims from all quarters assembled here and made an *enmasse* start after paying obeisance to Lord Ganapati, who occupies the first prominent place among the *Devas* (Divine spirits) and is approached first for the successful culmination of an undertaking.

Shurahyar about 4 Kms from Srinagar is situated on the right bank of *Vitasta* at the foot of Shankaracharya Hill, formerly called Gopadri (Kalhan's Rajtarangini) Pilgrims had a bath here. It is the first of the sixteen sacred ghats, still existing on either side of *Vitasta*. Tradition goes that Adi-Shankaracharya, while on his *dig-vijaya* (world tour) had morning ablution at *Shurahyar* Ghat. So it was known as *Shankara Ghat* also. At present a temple exists here.

Shivpora is adjacent to *Shurahyar*. There is no trace of a temple or a spring here at present. However ablution is prescribed here in the *Mahatmya*.

Pandrenthan is now in the Badami Bagh cantonment area. A palace was first built here by king Ashoka under the name *Puranadhishthan* (Kalhan's R.T.). During the reign of Pravarsen I, it was the capital of Kashmir. Ruins of the stone temple, built by Maharaja Partha, still exist here. The stone temple stands in the middle of a spring. It is about 7 kms. from Srinagar. Pilgrims took a bath here and worshipped the idol of *Shiva* in the temple. *Vitasta* flows nearby and was named Ganga (c.f. *Nilamat Puran*) at this place.

Pampore is 8 kms. from Pandrenthan. Here at *Syedhayar* (Siddha Kshetra) pilgrims had a sacred dip. The great mystic *Lalleshwari* lived here and *Lalla-trag* to her name is still in cognisance here. Pampore (*Padmapur*) was named after Maharaja Padma and the ruins of one of the two majestic temples still exist in the village. This temple was named *Vishnupadma Swami* (Rajtarangini, Kalhan—iv-695).

Borus, where pilgrims moved next, was formerly known as *Varisha*. A stream rising in the vicinity of the village flows down to meet *Vitasta* near by. The stream was known as *Rudra Ganga* and pilgrims had a sacred dip.

Avantipur was formerly known as *'Avantika'*, which is quite near *Yavati* (Zev-brar) and *Mishtode* (Mithavanya) villages. Avantika was known to be the Siddha Kshetra (place of Siddhas). Avantipur was the capital of Kashmir during the reign of Avantivarman (855-883 A.D.) The king had built two magnificent temples named *'Avantishwara'* and *'Avanti-*

Swami the ruins of which are still there just by one side of the National Highway. All the fatigue of pilgrims got removed by bathing in the refreshing water here. *Vitasta* is quite close.

Hariparigam is another village 15 kmr. ahead of Avantipur. In ancient dialect the village was called *Haridra.* Actually it consists of two villages standing close to each other. One is called *Parigam* and the other *Harigam.* There is a shrine of *Haridra-Ganapati,* a particular form of the god Ganesha in Harigam. Pilgrims had a sacred dip in the crystal-clear water of the spring here and worshipped the statue of the god, also known as *Hari-Ganesh.* The spring and the statue are still there. The Government has arranged to supply water to the neighbouring villages through pipes from this source. *Vitasta* is quite away from this low-land.

Baliyar is at a small distance from *Haridra.* There are sulpher springs in the suburbs of this village. These are called *Jeshtashada* springs and are ascribed to God *Ganesha* and Goddess *Lakshmi.* These springs had been surrounded by stone pavements, as the tradition goes, but mounds of earth accumulated since years have covered them leaving small outlets only. Pilgrims resumed onward journey soon after having sacred dips in the springs.

Wagahome is said to have been the birthplace of a great scholar of Kashmir named *Vagbhatta-charya.* This village was known as *Vagashrama* also. There are two springs (one big another small) existing to the present day. These are in paddy

fields now. The ancient name of the spring is *Hasti karan* and in Kashmiri dialect at present is called *'Hasakaly nag'*. The water, grey in colour, irrigates the paddy fields of the village at present. A mention of *Hastikaran Nag*[1] is made in Kalhan's *Rajtarangini* (v-23) *Nilamat Puran* (verse 985) and other old manuscripts. Pilgrims had only sacred sips here and proceeded on their journey in the low-land area.

Chakresha or Chakradhar is an alluvial plateau (*Udar*) which lies on the left bank of the *Vitasta*. It is one mile below the town of *Vejbror*. *Vishnu Chakradhar* had an ancient shrine here (c f Kalhan's *Rajtarangini* i-38n). Pilgrims probably did not go there as there was the river *Vitasta* to be crossed over. But there was great reverence for the shrine. The plateau bears the name Chakhdar even to this-day. Devaka (modern *Dagnore*) is another place nearby. This place is near *Sangam* along with the above-named one. *'Sangam'* name is given to the place as there is the confluence of the *Vitasta* and the *Bhringi* rivers.

Harishchandra-Tirth was the name of modern Bijbehara, in Kashmiri parlance *Vejbror*. The temple of Shiva-vijayesha or Vijayeshvara, since ancient times, one of the most famous shrines of the valley, has given its name to the town.

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1. As the name implies, shape of the spring almost resembles the ear of an elephant. The spring is about fifteen metres in diameter and the water is just elephant-grey. As related by an old villager on spot the water in the spring bubbles out violently for a day or two every second or third year in the month of Jeshta (April-May) and emits fish and grey silt.

The temple is believed to have been so high, that at sunset the shade of its top (*Kalash*) fell on the upper plateau of Martand (modern Mattan).

"A reconstruction of the temple is mentioned by Kalhan in the reign of Ashoka" (A. Stein).

Maharaja Ranbir Singh built a new temple from the old stone material in the second half of the nineteenth century A. D. at some distance higher up the river, which exists now.

Vejbror was a halting place for pilgrims to Amarnath. Learned Brahmins lived here. Sadhus were served *Sattvic* meals.

Sthalavat, modern *Thajvore*, is a famous shrine towards the right bank of the *Vitasta* and is about 4 kms. from Bijbehara. It is known as *Amrita Tirtha* or *Chhota Amarnath*. On the sloping mound of the plateau water oozes at two places by the side of a broken rock, where a *Chinar* also stands at present. Water trickles down into two springs from roots and rocky tips at the place. Pilgrims bathed in the stream below and had sacred sips from the springs after offering worship to the deity.

Suryaguhavat, present name *Sirigophavor*, is about 7 kms. from *Thajvor* on the right bank of Lambodari stream. Pilgrims had a refreshing bath here.

Suryashrama is a shrine and after this name the village is now called *Sirahom*. Pilgrims took sacred sips at the spring and distributed alms.

Badher (or Badhur) is another village ahead. Pilgrims had ablution in the stream here.

Sakar is a village surrounded by a plateau. Kothus and Chatrus are two villages nearby; one is situated at the plateau and the other at the foot. Here pilgrims worshipped Lord Ganesha. This place also was known as Badur, but the whole area is known as Kothus at present.

Saralaka is now called Saller. Here Pilgrims had a soothing bath in the stream.

Khilyayana or Khillan is a big village now. It was known as *Bala-Khilan* as we know from Puranas that there lived a large number of Rshis known as *Bala Khilyas*. They observed severe penance at the place called Vishnu Kshetra It was sanctified by Lord Vishnu after the *Rshis* ardently prayed to Him to bless them. Pilgrims after having ablution paid obeisance to Lord *Narayana* (*Vishnu*) - idol and proceeded quite refreshed.

Mamlaka, Mamesha or Mamleshvara (name of Lord Shiva) is the deity worshipped here. The statue is in a stone temple which is in the vicinity of Pahalgam on the right bank of the Lidder stream After having a sacred dip in the spring nearby, pilgrims had a glance at the Mamesha Linga in the temple and worshipped Ganesha also there. (Read story 1 in appendix I). From there the pilgrims crossed the stream to reach Pahalgam, a distance not more than a kilometre. Lamboodari (Lidder) flows through Pahalgam. Its source is the Kolahai glacier. A stream from Sheshnag lake, fed by other springs and

glaciers joins the Lidder here on its left. The dancing snow-fed streams that abound Pahalgam are unique. The Lidder is called Lamboodari also. (Read story 2, appendix I). *Ganesh Bal* is an ancient shrine of *Ganapati* situated at a very short distance down-stream, just on the right bank of *Lidder.* Lord *Ganesha,* in the from of a huge boulder in the middle of the stream is worshipped here. A small temple stands on the bank.

CHAPTER III

The Present Route

Pahalgam, the sleepy little village of shepherds has now opened its eyes to time. It is after the name of that village that *Bhrigu-Tirtha* (Read story3 in appendix I) and the whole area of that fine forest known as *Paresheela* forest according to ancient *Mahatmyas,* has adopted the name Pahalgam. It is one of the most popular tourist resorts now, and forms an excellent base, perhaps the best in Kashmir, for treks. The 96-kilometre journey from Srinagar to Pahalgam is covered by car or bus in about three hours. Since the construction of metalled road Pahalgam has transited into the modern world. The dancing snow-fed streams and the unspoilt beauty of the landscape lure the visitor.

Availability of wheeled traffic brought a marked change in the old pilgrim-route to Amarnath.

It changed by and by. Now pilgrims, coming from various parts of India, assemble there and wait for the *Chhari Sahib* which arrives on a definite date i. e. the eleventh day of the bright moon of *Shravana*, after passing through the contemplated stages from Srinagar. In fact, the starting point after Srinagar has become Pahalgam now.

The Chhari leaves Srinagar on the 4th day of the bright fortnight of *Shravana* after performing the inaugural worship at *Dashanami Akhara* (Srinagar) where Dr. Karan Singh, the sole trustee of the Dharmarth Trust (Jammu & Kashmir) and a state official give this guiding party a happy send off. The carrier of the Chhari—the holy sceptre—must walk on foot. The party visits *Hari Parbat* and *Shankaracharya temple* before departure The pilgrims go by stages, as did those of old, but by a different route. They by-pass the places of interest mentioned in the old route (chapter II above) as described in the *Amareshwara Mahatmya*. The first halt is at Pampore. Ayantipur is the second halting place. Next day Sadhus, accompanying the Chhari Sahib are given a dinner in Bijbehara temple premisis. The villagers participate in this fair of hermits and in their language call it '*Gosany Mela*'. The procession then takes form from Anantnag about 8kms from Bijbehara.

Anantnag has developed into a modern town. It is known for its several springs of which the largest is reputed to be the abode of Ananta, the serpent with numerous heads. There is a sulphur spring also. A great festival is celebrated by the

townsfolk who assemble there to have a peace-giving glimpse of the Sadhus whom they serve with simple *Sattwic* food (*Dal-roti*).

Bhawan (Mattan or Martand) is about 7 kms. ahead. Pilgrims assemble there the following day to have ablution in the sparkling water of the Martand spring. Obsequial oblation is performed there particularly on *Vijay Saptami*—a Sunday falling on the seventh day of bright-fortnight.

Aishmuqam, 15 kms. from Bhawan, is the next halting point for the pilgrims. There is the tomb of famous saint *Zaina-Shah-Sahib*. The Hindus know him as *Janak Rishi*. Pilgrims pass one night here. Aishmuqam is a place of Geological interest. Pahalgam is 18 kms. ahead of this place. So by the tenth day of the bright fortnight pilgrims assemble at Pahalgam. The old route from Srinagar to this place has already been described in the second chapter.

Most of the people now go to Pahalgam by bus from Srinagar or other parts of the valley on this tenth day, so that they join the pilgrimage on its start for Chandanwari next day.

From Pahalgam to the cave, the 56-kilo metre route had been in use since ancient time, till the early 19th century A.D. By and by changes took place. Since the beginning of the present century the path has been deviated at certain stages so as to avoid passing through perilous ascents and turns, such as *Bhairava Bal* and *Hatyary Talav*.

After leaving Pahalgam the path is generally narrow and uneven. The shady path under lofty pines, which emit sweet fragracne, gives relief to the pilgrim. This served as a bridle path previously. Now light vehicles such as Jeeps and cars ply on it just in the tourists' interest.

Rama - Kund and *Sita - Kund* are two holy springs about 1½ kmrs. ahead of Pahalgam. Adjacent to these springs there is a huge boulder called *Renjana*. In Kasnmiri dialect it is called '*Reenzya Pal*' (Read Story 4 in Appendix I). About 4 kms. ahead there is a village named 'Frislan'. This is the last point of human habitation on this path. At the distance of another 4 kms. pilgrims arrive at 'Neela Ganga'.

Neela Ganga is a place of scenic beauty. One would, at the instance of Lord *Shiva*, like to sit for meditation. Gurgling blue water, in the rushing stream flows past through boulders at this place. (See story 5 in Appendix I).

Chandanwari is at the distance of 16 kms. from Pahalgam. This inner range of exquisite forest scenery is at the altitude of 2923 metres above sea-level. A trek on the zigzag pathway through these finest woodlands in the world is rewarding. This is the first leg of the mountain-journey to Amarnath. Pilgrims stay there for one night. They make an early start next morning after a cold but refreshing bath in the stream flowing by and performing of worship.

The old name of the place, according to Amareshwara Mahatmya, is *Sthanuashrama*. 'Sthanu' is

an epithet of Shiva and literally it means 'a pollard'. Lord Shiva sat in samadhi like a pollard in the lap of the Himalayas where *Deovdar* grew, after the immolation of Sati (His spouse). Next, *Parvati* came to live in Chandana-Vatika as she was eager to marry *Shiva*. From certain sources it is believed that '*Kama-dahan*', burning of the Cupid to ashes by Lord *Shiva*, had taken place there. (Reference: *Kumarasambhava* of *Kalidas*—Act II 53-56 and Act III, 23). Later the whole place came to be known as Chandanwari. (see story 6 in Appendix I).

Pissu mount is two kilometres from Chandanwari. Prashat demon was killed at this place. (Read story 7 in Appendix I). There is a moderately difficult ascent. Then a snow - bed is to be passed over. Forest trees have thin growth now as the height is 3385 mtrs. above sea level. The steep ascent up the Pissu Mount is easily negotiated if an early start is made from Chandanwari. If it rains while going up the mount, it becomes slippery and consequently dangerous to proceed. On reaching the top while the pilgrim rests for a while he enjoys the glorious panorama of dense forest-mountains and snowy peaks. Now one steps into the alpine region. An alpenstock in the hand of a pilgrim, right from the foot of the hill, facilitates his journey.

Further, the path leads through a narrow descent where icy masses give an illusion of white marble, below which murmuring sound of rushing streams fills the traveller with awe. Looking around the charming snow-capped mountain-tops wherefrom

water flows in streamlets, one feels transformed to the region of music and beauty. The place ahead is *Brijal Koot* where sweet and refreshing water flows from *Sonasar* lake. Then follows a camping ground called *Zaj Pal* (3453 mtrs above sea level), which is of tourist interest also. Fragrance of wild flowers and flowery shrubs is exquisite and one is apt to get intoxicated. The plain goes along the side of the famous *Sheshanag lake*. The path beyond is rugged and rough. Then there is a hard ascent of about one km. which is rocky and zigzag. This is called *Koot*. At the top there is again a plain path. No trees grow now beyond the snowline. Then a down-steep path leads to Sheshnag lake. But most of the people, tired as they are, prefer to follow the upper path. They join the pilgrims at the ascent of *NagaKoot*. From there it is 2.5 kmr. to reach Wavajan. The view of Sheshnag is very clear from this place. The milkly-water of the lake is seen just 200 mtrs down in a trough-shaped basin.

Sheshnag or *Sheshramnag :* This place is 12 kms. from Chandanwari. The lake 25sq. kmrs. in area, is fed by the Kohenhar glacier (5178 mtrs.) which looks like the hood of a cobra. Hence the present name. The old name given to the lake in Kalhan's *Rajtarangini* is *Sushramnag* which reproduces the older form *Sushravas*, the name of the serpent who migrated to this lake. Sushravas means one possessed of good fame. (Read stories 8 and 9 in Appendix I). With a popular etymology it is known as *Sheshramnag* or *Sheshnag*. The sight presents a breath-taking beauty of nature

in her nakedness. The water coming from the two small glaciers on the flanks of the surrounding high mountains feeds the lake. Tiny streaks of water flowing over the rocky slopes move like silvery snakes and disappear into the lake. The lake on one side is silted up while on the other stream from it has carved out a deep ravine which is covered with birch trees. Fragrance of flowers from the juniper and other bushes makes the march more pleasent. It is believed that the water of Sheshnag emits through Anantnag spring. The milky white colour of the lake water is probably due to gypsum present in the surrounding mountain rocks.

Wavjen is the second leg of this mountain track. Reaching this place on the 13th day of the bright fortinght of *Shravana*, pilgrims have to tighten their tents firmly and wrap their bodies with warm clothes as the place (height 3737 metrs) is exposed to strong winds. The name '*Wavjen*' (Kashmiri dialect), is rightly given to the place as the wind demon is always present there. (It has reference to *Prashat* demon in story 7 appendix I). The demon had challenged the favour of Lord Shiva to the gods. In Sanskrit it is named I '*Vayu Varjen*' which means 'killing the wind. This name is justified with the legend that the calamity caused by the wind demon to gods and sages at this place was brought to an end by Indra the chief of the gods, when he killed the former with his mighty thunderbolt. The sages were advised to safeguard themselves by erecting miniature huts of stone Traditionally even

now pilgrims raise miniature stone enclosures called *Mathikas*, a protection to safeguard against the strong winds which keep blowing there. They offer cash and kind there to give away to Brahmins. This 'Mathika-Dan' at this central table-land of the seven hills is considered to accrue virtue for the pilgrim. Nothing grows on this starkly dessolate place except the Himalayan turf and a kind of bushy shrub called juniper, which may rightly be called the friend of the pilgrim on this land. The green bush burns with a bright flame, the moment a lighted match is shown to it. This is an instant source of fuel whether it rains or snows. In Kashmiri the wood of the bush is called '*Yathur*'. Slate rock is also found at this place. Variety of flowers give intoxicating fragrance and weak people generally fall prey to its fainting effect. Pilgrims, therefore, keep sour - tasting pills of salt - pepperment, black pepper or lemon to avoid the intoxicating effect. One enjoys the impressive sight of Sheshnag lake during moonlight from this height. Glaciers present a glaring look. Very rapid changes of weather are experienced at Wavjen.

Leaving Wavjan early next morning pilgrims start in a procession led by the Chhari Sahib. The route is again arduous. Pilgrims have to climb up a stiff stretch of about 5 kms to reach the *Mahagunas* pass (4356 mtrs high). It is called *Ashad Daki*. This top is the highest in the whole track. Thereafter, the track dips and they have to pass through the *Poshpathri* (3808 mtrs), the lovely valley of flowers. Here one comes across the most fascinating variety of wild

flowers which have intoxicating effect. The scenery around is charming. On one side rises a huge mountain while on the other, hundreds of feet below, a noisy stream flows. They say that the herb *Mahagunas* used to grow around the place. On the mountain side delicate little butter-cups and a variety of wild flowers sweep up to the sky-line. Along the stream there are flat green spaces across which impudent marmots scamper whistling in glee. Mighty glaciers and rocky peaks boom around.

After a slow and short descent there is again an ascent called *Vavabal* (the wind hill). The path leads through an open and wide plain, where bitter winds keep blowing. A part of this path is rocky. From the plain gounnd '*Bhairav Bal*' mountain lying between Panchatarni and Amarnath cave fall to sight. Water flows in abundance in this plain. Then pilgrims reach 'Hoksar' and 'Kail Nar'. '*Kail Nar*' is a changed combination of *Kali* (the daity) and *Nar* (the pass). Bhagwati *Kali* is worshipped here. Then the path divides on either side of the mountain range

Pilgrims formerly, returning from the Amarnath cave did not go by Hoksar but turned right at Kailnar and proceeded back towards Pahalgam via *Hatyar Talav* (see story 10 Appendix 1). descending a long mountain path of '*Sasa-kat*', to pass the night at Astanmarg. But this route is prohibited by the Government because the descent over the sandy path of '*Sas kat bal*' was not safe in bad weather. Hence pilgrims from Panchatarni hasten their jour-

ney down to Chandanwari to reach Pahalgam the next day.

From *Kail Nar* to Panchatarni the pathway is almost plain, girdled by a stream. About 1½km onwards there is a mound called *Alsi-Teng* (the mound of indolence). Reaching the place, every pilgrim throw a stone behind his back, with an understanding that he/she bids adieu to indolence and proceeds with a pure and sincere heart towards the seat of Lord *Shiva*—realization of the reality of life. Then a narrow path over stones leads to a big boulder which is named *Nagara Pal*—the stone for drum-beating. It is the sacred place of *Pareshwara Bhairava.* The vanguard of the pilgrims stays here. Each pilgrim strikes the *Nagara Pal* with a small stone repeating the holy name, 'Jai Amarnath Ji ki'. For this purpose a drum used to be kept here so that every pilgrim would sound it with a beat or two to herald his presence to Lord *Shiva* in the cave. Four-walled miniature huts *Mathikas* are raised here also. About two kms. ahead starts the bed of the five streams —Panchatarni.

Panchatarni is a wide plain among the mountain ranges, where five streams flow side by side (Read story 11 in Appendix I). Pilgrims generally bathe in all the five streams. Temprature of water varies from one stream to another. Going across these streams there is the sixth stream in which pilgrims have ablution and perform *Shradha.* This stream flows with greater force to meet the confluence of the five streams. The same river further

joins the Amarawati stream on its down-flow and the place is named *Sangam*. Panchatarni is 2923 mts. above sea-level, at the foot of *Bhairava Ghati* mountain. The whole range is rich in herbs. Since cattle and sheep graze everywhere around, the variety of fragrant flowers is not felt in abundance here. Pilgrims reach this place on the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight and are jubillantly ready to proceed to Amarnath early next morning—the *Shravana Purnima* day.

Panchatarni to Amarnath via Bairavabal (old route)

Ratnashikhara is the name given to *Bhairava Parvat*, commonly known as *Bhairava Bal* or *Bhairava Ghati*. After performing ablution and giving away charity at Panchatarni in very early hours of the purnima, pilgrims formerly ascended the Ratnashi khara top to approach the demigod *Darmaraka*, turned to stone (see story 12 Appendix I). They had to cross over the *Bhairava Ghati* to reach the cave facing hazards in the way. The route is over six kms. long and has steep ascent. Ponies could not go by this way. One had to walk with sufficient restraint and patience. Colourful flowers with their dopping fragrance have strong fainting effect at the place. Feet slipped over the lime stone track which goes zigzag. After the ascent of about a kilometre, there is plain ground called '*Malish*'. A single stream flows there. It is called Bhairava stream. There is ice all round. Damaraka Bhairava a demi-god turned to a huge stone by curse, is at the top. From there the cave

of Amarnath falls in direct sight and one could see pilgrims moving like ants. It is a sight to be enjonyed.

Pilgrims went this way to the cave in ancient times even up to the early 19th century. At *Damaraka* some Sadhu pilgrims would throw their bodies tumbling down at this statue of *Bhairva* with firm faith that the harakiri would emancipate them. But this practice has totally stopped now.

The descent of 2½ kms. onwards is so steep that one had simply to move like a quadroped. At places the path leads over glaciers. Further the pilgrim had to pass through a narrow path about 3 mtr. long. It is covered with big boulders on both sides and above. The tunnel-like narrow path could not accommodate more than seven persons at a time to crawl ahead. The place is named *Garbhagar* the womb-like cave (see story 13 appendix I). This suggests restriction in approaching the Lord. But the old route is no more in use now. Just half a kilometer down-steep pace takes the pilgrim to the yawning cave of Swami Amarnath.

Panchatarni to Amarnath (present route).

The present route from Panchatarni to Amarnath cave is known as Sant Singh Route. In early 19th century Sant Singh, a relative of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, negotiated the shrine by this route. This route being free from risk, is now the only route by which pilgrims coming from Pahalgam proceed to the cave. Beyond Panchatarni, since ponies

and palanquines are not used, pilgrims start early before dawn and passing by the *'Sangam'* proceed to ccver an ascent called *'Brari Dalav'*. The narrow path hemmed in between snow mountains presents a heart-ravishing scenery. Thereafter the descent over *Prana-Dalay* commences. About a kilometre ahead there is a place called *'Neha Nar'*—the gorge of destination – where the race of pilgrims comes to an and. It is all ice and ice around. The Sonamarg route towards the cave (now used by some local pilgrims and armymen) joins the [Sant Singh route at this place. Now the holy cave stares at the pilgrimage in front.

Pilgrims cross the ice-cold stream flowing down the narrow valley over a snow bridge. Just in front on the right side of the facing cave shimmers the snow-white Amaravati stream below. Amaravati is belived to be the most sacred stream.

Lord Shiva is the destroyer of ignorance. He is the light of lights. Therefore all other lights of the Sun, the Moon, the lightning etc. emanate from Him and also merge in Him. To illustrate this, Lord Shiva puts on His head the crescent moon (*Soma Kala*) from which nectar flowed in the form of Amaravati to grant immortality to gods who had approached him for the purpose. (Read story 14 appendix I).

On reaching the destination of their long and hazardous journey the pilgrims marvel at the skilful hand of nature. Every pilgrim, after having a sacred bath in the Amaravati torrent and besmearing the chalky sediment called sacredly *'Ambutbooth'*, all oevr his body, is in ecstasy. Putting on new loin-cloths

or draped in white from head to foot, dancing pilgrims enter the cave. For a moment they become one with the Supreme. Returning to physical consciousness they have a glimpse of the *Sudha-Linga* of pure greenish-white ice, standing on a natural pedestal called *'peetha'*. Water drops trickling from the roof of the cave fall on the pilgrims. This is called Amrita-Dhara. This is believed to be the water of immortality dripping by the flow of Amarawati over the cave top.

The Mahant of the *'Chhari'* sits near the pedestal with two silver staves placed on either side of the Amara-Linga. The pilgrims offer *Pooja* to the deity with flowers carried all the distance with faith and devotion to the Lord. They make presents of raisins, black pepper, candy-sugar, clove, cardamum, clothes, gold and silver ornaments. They also wave burning camphor and lamps of clarified butter and dhoop—an insence. The recitations from the Vedas and the Tantras echo through the spacious cave. Pilgrims are wonder-struck when a pair of pigeons make their appearance at the juncture. They fly from their perches (Read story 15 in appen. I). Looking at them the pilgrims shout in chorus— **Ishwar darshan Paya re** (we are blessed with a glimpse of the Lord). From the offerings pilgrims receive sugar-candy, raisins, black-pepper etc. as Prasad, which they carry back home and distribute among their relatives and friends along with the *'Amburbooth'*— the Bhabhuti of Lord Shiva.

The return Journey

The return Journey to Pahalgam is made in two days. Soon after leaving the cave obsequial rites are performed at the *'Sangam'*. Formerly, coming back to Mamlaka marked completion of the pilgrimage virtually. Pilgrims from there, crossed over a hill named *'Bugmor Bal'* on their way from Mamlaka to Tral. About 6 kmr. from Tral there is a small village called 'Navadala' which was thought to be the last stop for completnig the pilgrimage. There they made obsequail offerings to their departed souls and performed *'Yashti Dan'*—imersing of a stick in the stream-water to mark the completion of the pilgrimage. The stream is called *Patala-Ganga*. But now-a-days, since pilgrims return via Pahalgam direct to their respective places, they go to Navadal at a later convenient time if they desire and perform the rites to ensure the completion of the sacred pilgrimage.

CHAPTER IV

The New Route

The Amarnath shrine, through the new route, is 110 kmr. from Srinagar. Of this 94 kmr. consist of a fine macadam road, which is a part of the Srinagar–Leh national highway. The last 16kmr. stretch forming the Baltal-Amarnath track about 1.8 metres wide was built by GREF engineers and has been in use since 1971. It is becoming more popular year after year as it is an easy, cheap and time-

saving route. Its demerit is that it has no traditional pilgrim spots en route. Medical and other facilities are not as yet provided by the State Government on this route.

The road from Srinagar passes through the valley of Sonamarg (2589 mtrs. high) where you can feel the glaciers without any trouble. The buses stop at Baltal from where you are on your own. The first 2.5 kmr. section of the route is the only level stretch of the path upto Amarnath. This part has now been metalled by the army authorities to enable their light vehicles to ply. Thereafter starts the climb and gradually you gain the height of about 1000 metres. An arduous ascent of about 3kmr. through pine forests, takes you to *Brarimarg*. The track runs through the *Kuth Pather* and *Nagin Pather* mountains. Now beyond the snow-line you find starkly desolate mountains everywhere. There are mostly the masses of slate and granite. At several places deep down in the canyons the river is covered by premordial glaciers Their upper crusts are yellow with time but they sparkle in the Sun.

After climbing up 300 metres you reach the Brarimarg pass. From there on it is a downward descent to Sangam, the confluence of the Sind and the Amaravati. Some stretches are very stiff and difficult. At such places you have to go in a single file. Another arduous ascent of about half a kmr. lies ahead This is the last challenging climb. After this the trek is comparatively easy, and the climb gradual. At 'Neha Nar' pass the route turns to Dardkut where the Pahalgam pilgrim path joins it. The pathway follows the right bank of the Amaravati till you reach the foot of the shrine. After the 'darshan' you return the same way and reach Srinagar the same day.

APPENDIX I

(Important Stories from the Amareshwara Mahatmya)

1. The Story of Mamleshwara

Once Lord 'Shiva' assigning charge of the two gates at Sthalavat (Thajvor) to Ganapati, went ahead of Khilan in the forest of the ascetic named Dandaka. He had hardly cooled his heels when the gods assembled there with all glee. Seeing the gods congregated there, He said in an imperative voice exhorting them again and again "Don't, don't, O gods! do not come here". Hearing Lord Shiva shouting thus the selfsame Ganapati, in quick haste, came running from the lower region of Sthalavat. Holding his axe in his hands he threw the words 'Ma, ma" (don't, don't) at the Devas. While Ganapati uttered these words, all the gods got dissolved in that voice. Since, under the influence of Ganapati's prohibitive call, all the gods in a body, got absorbed in the transcendental Shiva, the place was given the name Mamaleshwara.

2 The Story of Lamboodari

Once when Shiva-Parvati were resting in their abode at Kailas, Ganpati, on his own kept guard at the gate. Thereupon, Lord Shiva, in His own right, instructed Ganesha to see that nobody approached there. Even the gods were to be warded off. Mahadeva was engrossed in sprotive conversation with his divine consort, Parvati.

Meanwhile, Indra heckled by Tripura demon, in that company of gods, repaired there, seeking an audience with the Great Lord. Indra, the King of gods, was stopped by Ganapati from going in. Feeling incensed, Indra tried to unlash his missile thunderbolt on Ganesha in return. But Ganesha paralysed Indra's arm with a loud 'hum'. Beholding the valour, the latter fell at the former's feet like a fallen stick and appeased him with reverential obeisance. Ganesha's wrath abated and he cast a kind look upon Indra. He released the arm of Indra and fulfilled his desire. Indra offered obeisance again and left for his own abode.

After the incident Ganapati felt hungry and thirsty. He took sweet fruit in the forest and drank the entire content of the stream flowing by. His belly got swollen. When Lord Shiva saw this He beat his belly with His Damru, the mini-drum and gave him the towering name, Lamboodara. This made Ganapati vomit the water, which flowed again in the stream that got the name 'Lamboodari' which is now known as the 'Liddar'.

3 The Story of Bhrigu Tirtha

In ancient time a great sage named Bhrigu performed severe penance in the forest called Parisheela. The sage remained absorbed in meditation for a considerable period. At last Lord Vishnu came there to bless him. Bhrigu, along with all the gods received Him and in obeisance worshipped the Lord with great devotion. The Primeval Being raised up Bhrigu, who had fallen at His feet soaked with

tears of joy. The Lord planted a kiss ar the crown of the sage. Then Vishnu and Bhrigu fell into each other's arms. The compression thereof caused the most sanctified sweat trickle down from their body-limbs forming a virtue-ploughing hallowed spot in that peerless Parisheela forest. On account of the perspiration produced with the embrace of Bhrigu and Vishnu, that spot changed into a spring and earned lasting fame as Bhrigu-kshetra or Bhrigu-Tirth. The spring existed where the present Dak-Bangalow of Pahalgam is situated.

4 The story of Renjana (Reenzya Pal)

About 1½ kms. ahead of Pahalgam, on the Amarnath route, the forest was known as 'Renjana Vana'. Once Rama, Sita and Laksman, wading through the Renjana forest, beheld demons who were furious and extremely tipcy. Looking at the demons sweat trickled down from their bodies. This formed two pious pools on the sylvan height. The pools are called 'Rama-kund' and 'Sita-kund'.

Rama ascended the huge boulder nearby and from its top aimed at the demons. A large number of the demons was killed. The remaining ran about for shelter to hide their heads. With sprays of blood of the slain demons, the huge boulder, which appears like a small hill, turned red. With the touch of Ramas' sacred feet the quality of making others holy was transformed to it. This boulder got the local name 'Reenzya Pal'. By taking this boulder into account one gets freed from sins.

5. The story of Neel Ganga

Once while Shiva was sporting with Parvati in privacy, He kissed Her eyes to which collyrium had been applied. This black pigment tainted Shiva face and mouth. When Parvati saw Shiva's face tainted, she in sport, made Him look into the transparent water of the stream flowing nearby Seeing the black taint on his mouth, stuck like the black shimmer of His matted locks, Shiva at once washed it away with the water of the stream flowing by. The water turned dark-blue and the stream came to be known as Neela Ganga.

6 The Story of Sthanuashram (Chandanawari)

Chandanwari is known by the name Sthanu-ashram in the mahatmya books. A groove just near this place is known as Chandana-vatika According to Puranic tales, once Lord Shiva, in separation of his former consort Sati undertook arduous penance on the sylvan heights of the Him alayas. Sati had suffered dishonour at the place of her father, king Daksha and immolated herself. Sad Shiva retired to inner Himalayas and remained engrossed in meditation.

Parvati, who loved Shiva the most, came there to do panance, meditating upon Shankara. She continued the penance for long in Chandana-Vatika, but the Lord did not complete His abstract meditation. He was like a pollard (*Sathanu*). Hence the place got the name *Sthanu-ashrama*. It is beheved

that according to Kalidasa's Kumarasambhava (canto I verses 53-56 and canto III verse 23) that *Kama-dahan*-burning of the cupid to ashes - by Shiva took place near about the present Chandanwari.

7. The Story of Pissu Mount

Once demons and gods, joining hands with each other, set out to steal a glance over Lord Shiva whc was in meditation, sitting like a pollard, in the vicinity of Sthanuashram (Chandanwari). They were intent on stealing march over one another. It was a virtual stampede to gain distance from one another. This rivalary culminated in their mutual fight to gain vantage point while going up the mount Pissu. The best among the gods pounded the demons down to tiny bits, forbidding their onward ascent at this point. The gods felt relieved. The mount, where the demons led by their chief, called '*Prashat*' were pounded, came to be known as Pesha Giri (Pesha=pound; Giri=mount)- Pesha later was pronounced as 'Pissu'. In Kashmiri parlance it is called '*Pish Bal*'.

8. The Story of Sheshnag

In ancient time, during Satya yuga (the golden age) gods, sages and celestial beings, accompanied by demigods, went to line up on the pious peak of the Himalaya mountain in the vicinity of Amareshwara. This would afford them easy worship, clear glimpse of and meditation on the Lord.

In the meantime, the fierce chief of demons, Prashat by name, appeared in the form of wind. He

was very sinewy and puffed up with the consummation of his penance. He indulged in teasing gods. His chief weapon was the wind, with which he inflicted misery upon the gods. The gods, along with their chief Indra, sought refuge with the great Lord Amareshwara - Shiva. The Lord manifested Himself and addressed the un-nerved gods in a sweet voice thus: "O gods! I have listened to all what you said about the demon Prashat. But you must also know that it was I who made him grow, by granting him the boon. I am, therefore, loath to see him cut to his size. You approach Lord Vishnu who is staying in the midst of the milky ocean and relaxing on Shesha, the Lord of serpents".

Thereupon, the whole host of gods repaired to milky-ocean in full glee and highly satisfied. They pleased the Lord with their eulogies. Lord Vishnu allayed their discomfiture in these words: "O Venerable gods! for some time you go to heaven where you will be completely free from affliction. I will do away with that wicked wind-demon along with his tribe". Saying these words Lord Vishnu appeared in cosmic form through the nether regions, weilding divine weapons in His four arms, on the towering mountain, along with His consort Lakshmi and reclining on the *Shesha*. He exhorted the thousand-hooded *Shesha* to inhale quickly with his numerous mouths, the wind and feel fully refreshed as snakes live on wind. The numerous-headed serpent, in hot haste, drank up the violent wind in the form of the demon in no

time. Even then there remained a little trace of wind on the summit of the mountain range. *Shesha*, therefore, chose a habitat nearabout, as desired by Lord Vishnu. The gods were relieved of all sorts of impediments and the place came to be known as Sheshnag. The ancient name was *Sushravas* which later changed to *Sushrama*, and *Sheshram* and lastly to *Shesha*, '*Nag*' means a spring or a lake.

It is reported that in recent years also, some people (from pilgrims as well as from foreign visitors) have chanced to witness a multihooded serpent moving in the lake.

9. The Story of Sodya Von

Once a pious Brahmin named *Sodya-Von* was running a shop in a village most probably what is to-day known as '*Drug gan*' at the foot of Shankaracharya hill Everyday some boys of the village came to him for a (pinch of sugar) *Batas* One day one of the boys asked him for a second pinch, which he needed for another companion of whom he told that he was riding a bull. Curiosity in the shopkeeper was aroused when he heard that this new companion carried a trident in hand. He gave the pinches of sugar to the boy and asked him to guide him to that particular boy. *Sodya-Von* was a devotee of Lord *Shiva*. Next day the boys got more sugar-pinches than usual and they led the shopkeeper in the forest nearby. 'Lo ! he is the boy who comes to play with us everyday', said one. But the man could not see Him, whom he

considered to be *Shiva* Himself. Thereupon he entreated them to make him catch the tail of His bull.

It was evening time. The devotee, catching hold of the tail, was dragged over the rough path, bush and rock. After going some distance he heard a voice telling him to go to *Sheshramnag* on the following *Shivratri* day, where he would be blessed with *Shiva's darshan.*

It is believed that on the eve of the auspicious *Shivratri*, *Sodya-Von* disposed of his belongings and went to Pahalgam. Thence he proceeded to Sheshnag accompanied by some villagers. At *Sheshnag* he saw the great Lord along with His consort waiting in a splendidly furnished boat near the bank of the lake. *Sodya-Von* was greeted in the boat which soon vanished from sight. Kashmiri poets have sung of the devotion of *Sadya-Von.*

10. The Story of Hatyar-talav
(The dry pool)

During the battle between gods and demons in Pissu Ghati (Story 7), some demons had escaped and hid themselves in a pool just at a short distance from Wavjen. The pool was full of water. From there they teased the gods whenever an opportunity came. This created havoc.

One day *Parvati* and *Shiva*, engaged in sport passed this way to-gether. Parvati was filled with compassion for the gods, on seeing them tormented by the demons hiding in the pool. while

she was requesting Shiva to take pity on the obstructed gods, Shiva's bull uttered a menacing sound 'Hum'. The demons smitten with this bellowing sound hid themselves in the pool. Parvati, instantly uttered a curse on the pool: "Let dry spell befall the pool for all times to come and twin offerings to the gods and the manes be of no avail here". Soon after the curse was uttered, that captivating pool dried up.

A number of demons left over, is still apprehended to be there. The pilgrims are, therefore, cautioned to steal their way quite silently.

11. The Story of Panchatarni

During primeval days of Shiva's frantic dance, His matted locks (*kaparda*) got loose and spread in five rushes. The divine Ganga, whom He holds on the head, came out and flowed in five branches, which wash away all the sins The Ganges that flowed in five streams from the locks of Lord Shiva, thus was termed the Panchatarangini by those conversant with events.

12. The Story of Damraka

Shiva, as per routine, dances at dawn and dusk. One day He missed this twilight hour while He had been playing with His son Shanmukha (Kumar). When He became conscions of the negligence, He felt worried. Parvati enquired what the cause of this obsession was, Shiva told her that He had skipped over the twilight hour and that omission was giving Him unmitigating pain.

It is believed that demons try to make mortals uncomfortable at of dawn and dusk—the two junction times, understood to be the hours of concentration. Hence Lord Shiva beguils them with his dance (*Tandava*) till the twilight time is over. Here the Lord' felt sorry for the mortals who must have suffered at the hands of demons, since He had missed undertaking the routine dance to be-guile them. That was precisely what had made Him worried. Consequently, the chief demigod Damraka was ordered to hold a mini - drum by beating which he would he informing Shiva about the approach of the junction hours (*Sandhyas*).

One day while Lord Shiva was playing with *Kartikeya* as usual, *Damraka*, over-powered by inadver-tant sleep missed to beat the drum to apprise the Lord as usual. Shaggy Shiva again missed the twi-light hour. Later, in wrath, He cursed the chief demi-god to get fossilised there in the shape of a boulder for all times to come. After Shiva spelled the curse He sat in meditation for long on that lofty mountain. Since then *Damraka* stands transfor-med into stone on the top of Ratna-Shikhara known as Bhairav Parvat.

13. The Story of Garbhagar

One day gods, while not seeing eye-to-eye with each other, vehemently approached Nandi, the door-keeper of *Shiva*, to grant them access to the Lord. Though Nandi prohibited them from doing so, they did not give up quarrelling and Nandi

felt insulted. Approaching Lord *Shiva* he reported that he had felt very much exercised by the threatening attitude of the gods. He beseached the Lord to come to his succour.

The Lord , thereupon ordered a sanctuary to be raised all round Nandi at once with a single entrance so that neither the gods nor the demons could muster courage to tresspass. A big boulder was raised and carved to form a short-sized chamber. Nandi was asked to hold his staff erect and keep guard at the single door of the inner chamber of sanctuary. This was called *Garbhagar*.

14 The Story Amaravati

Once the gods approached Lord Shiva with great devotion. They requested Him to avert death in their case. The Lord was pleased with the devotional hymns sung in His praise. He took the crescent moon (adorning His head) in His hand and squeezed it. A peerless current flowed from the moon, taking the form of a stream known as the sanctifying *Amaravati*. This was the most efficacious antidote against death.

Then, asking the gods to go to their abodes, Lord *Shiva* stayed in the cave along with His divine spouse Parvati, for meditation. Ganesh and Kumar also found themselves comfortable bv Their side.

15. The Story of the Pigeons

After Damraka, the mini-drummer, was cursed by Lord *Shiva* to get transformed into a stone.

Parvati appointed two attendants (*Ganas*) so that they would be vigilant on each other in apprising Lord Shiva of the twilight hours.

One day, when it was time for Lord *Shiva* to perform *tandava* (dance) at dusk, these attendants, out of defiance, asked each other to accomplish the assignment of announcing the approaching hour to Shiva. This din of 'you do it, you do it' (*Kuru-Kuru* rose to heights by their mutual rivalry. Thereupon, feeling incensed the great Lord hurled a curse upon the attendants in these words :-

"Since you, out of defiance made 'Kuru-Kuru' sound without any break, so you, O *Ganas*, have to stay here for all time to come, making this sound in the form of pigeons, also warding off obstacles at this hallowed spot".

With the curse, those attendants got transformed into pigeons, and continue to live at this place of sanctity, symbolising the eradication of obstacles of the pilgrims at this spot.

APPENDIX II

Some guide lines for pilgrimage to Amarnath :

1 Non-Vegetarian diet and drinking are strictly prohibited for the pilgrim as well as the visitor of whatever caste, creed or colour he may be.

2 Religious minded people abhor putting on leather shoes. Pilgrims used grass-shoes (*Puluhor*) or canvas shoes with jute sole (bangi boot) formerly for these were found most useful in going over glaciers. Now rubber - sole canvas shoes are used. Leather shoes, if used, must have nailed soles.

3 The following equipment will prove of great use to the trekker :-

i) A staff with an iron spike.
ii) Warm-clothes and blankets to minimum requirement.
iii) A water-proof coat or an umbrella.
iv) Cinnamon for use along with tea.
v) Cuminseed and camphor for occasional smelling during the march. It serves as an antidote against the intoxicating fragrance of wild flowers (growing from Pissu Ghati to Panchatarni)
vi) A strong tent of a small size. Government sheds are generally occupied by Sadhus.

4 The Government of Jammu & Kashmir make elaborate arrangements on the occasion for the convenience of pilgrims :

i) There is a civil officer to regulate the whole affair.
ii) Medical Aid is provided.
iii) Security measures are enforced.
iv) Rates of ponies, coolies, dandis, and palanquines etc. are fixed.
v) There is a regular bazar held at each stage. Shopkeepers, confectioners, grain-dealers & vegetable-sellers etc. sell various articles.
vi) P & T arranges telephonic mes-sages.
vii) Radio and T. V. arrangements also exist.

5 Private *Bandars*, set up by great philanthropists provide food, tea and clothes to needy pilgrims free of cost.